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Michael Braukus
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(Phone: 202/358-1979)

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Keith Henry
Langley Research Center, Hampton, Va.
(Phone: 757/864-6120) or h.k.henry@larc.nasa.gov

John F. Sheehan
National Consortium for Aviation Mobility, Hampton, Va.
(Phone: 757/766-7520)

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NASA selects partner for aviation research

NASA has selected a partner for a joint venture to develop and demonstrate air mobility technologies for transportation using small aircraft and small airports.

The National Consortium for Aviation Mobility (NCAM), Hampton, Va., will lead a broad-based public/private consortium of more than 130 members, which is expected to grow. NCAM will work with NASA toward a mid-2005 proof-of-concept of new operational capabilities, geared toward technologically advanced small aircraft and small airports.

The proof-of-concept is a flight demonstration that will be the culmination of the NASA Small Aircraft Transportation System (SATS) research and technology program, led by NASA's Langley Research Center, Hampton, Va.

As envisioned, the SATS is an equitable, on-demand, point-to-point, widely distributed nationwide transportation system. It relies on advanced 4- to 10-passenger aircraft using new operating capabilities. Such a system promises improved safety, efficiency, reliability and affordability for small aircraft operating within the nation's 5,400 public-use-landing facilities. This research will evaluate technologies and procedures that could significantly extend reliable air service to many communities. The impact of this research could be more equitable distribution of air-accessibility and economic opportunity.

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Enabling the SATS vision requires transportation system innovations too risky and costly for any one entity to undertake; therefore, NASA is taking the first step on the path to the SATS vision — a proof-of-concept of the feasibility.

To implement the proof-of-concept, NASA has opted to initiate a public/private partnership that includes the Department of Transportation, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and NCAM. NASA believes this type of public/private venture will bring together key transportation community stakeholders needed to guide the research and increase technology transfer and commercialization opportunities for all partners.

NASA and other federal agencies are expected to contribute up to \$40 million over the next four years to support the joint sponsored-research agreement, a cost sharing partnership between the federal government and the consortium.

NCAM will lead a consortium of private businesses and public entities spanning much of the nation. One of NCAM's early tasks will be to coordinate the technology development efforts of the members of the consortium with NASA's research. Consortium membership includes industry partners from the Advanced General Aviation Transportation Experiment Alliance Association Inc.; three state/regional SATLABS partnerships of Virginia, Maryland and Southeast (Fla. and Ga.), and other state and local aviation authorities; airport operators; general aviation manufacturers; transportation services suppliers; transportation research institutions (including universities); pilot training institutions; and suppliers of communication, navigation and surveillance systems for small transportation aircraft.

Langhorne Bond — a former FAA administrator with extensive experience in a broad range of public transportation fields — will serve as NCAM consortium president. John F. Sheehan will serve as NCAM executive director. Sheehan has more than 35 years of directly applicable experience in both the technical and business development aspects of the aerospace and defense industry.

A listing of initial NCAM membership is available at:

http://www.larc.nasa.gov/news_and_events/inside_pages/2002/NCAM.pdf